

## Presenting Some Evidence That Even the Shrewd May Be Fleeced Sometimes by the Professional Sure-Thing Man

A CHORUS girl had named him. She didn't know him, except as the man who signed the pay voucher; but then she'd seen him in the street, a great deal. He didn't look like a name, didn't act like it, wasn't a name, dressed in the quiet, business-like style which is supposed to be entirely foreign to circus grafters, and at times could be exceedingly sour. To wit, alighting from his private car and standing a moment on the bottom step in contemplative disgust as he surveyed the raucous approaches to the metropolis of Blue Ridge, Ohio, meanwhile waiting until Bart Edwards, the fixer, should approach to a very private conversation.

The fixer was tall and well built and dressed in a manner which gave the impression that he might own a circus. His job consisted of the task of persuading city councils to admit that when a man tries to get something for nothing and loses, he is really not gambling. It also included the vocation of inducing justices of the peace to take a one-day vacation on circus dates, buying new hats for sheriffs, accepting liability in attachment suits, restoring lost, bawling children to wild-eyed mothers; reducing license fees, settling the damages of the inevitable runaway and other duties demanding the presence of some one conspicuous, some one who could be pointed out, found at any moment, easily identified and of a type distinctive.

Sweetie Papa looked as if he might run a respectable neighborhood cash and carry or own a last year's automobile. His eyes were mild and blue and retreating in their gaze; his manner was innately apologetic; his clothing of that out which tailors make for men who have ceased looking for jobs. Sweetie Papa owned the show and he owned Bart Edwards. And more, he owned the brains which allowed a grafting organization, carrying all those mild educational devices such as the "big joint," the old, familiar, three shells, the "Coloquial Joint," with its "capital cash county advertising prize," the "knock-down pins," the "five to one," the "big bet," and a number of other "stories" of inconspicuous but highly lucrative returns, to operate as a family circus, with an excellent name for truth, quietude, uprightness and satisfying performance. Sweetie Papa's circus was all that one could desire from a point of morality, cleanliness and safety for the casual observer. But for the man whose blood ran red hot and who thought he knew more about a roulette wheel than the fellow who only that morning had tested the batteries—well, that was a different matter. All of which had a bearing upon the lugubrious expression of Fixer Bart as he came forward and grasped at the brass rail of the private car steps.

"Thought I'd better tip off Three Card Monte to tell the crowd at the lot to stay under cover unless you passed 'em the office," he began. "You had the dope."

Sweetie Papa studied an iridescent ray from the diamond on his left hand, with mild, harassed eyes.

"Didn't even try to fix, huh?"

"Me? No, I laid off like a section hand on a holiday. It's his town, all right."

"Blackbirds?"

"Yep. Owns the biggest bank, the livery stable, two garages, the county council and the police department, the farms just outside town, controls the politics and—"

"All on my money?" said Sweetie Papa. "How is he as a person these days?"

"Tighter'n a warped window."

"Same old Blackbird, then?"

"Worse. Lends money at 10 per cent interest and sits up all night to foreclose the mortgage. Got a lot of credits around town that a fish has eyes. If we'd ever start the privileges here, we'd pay out more in petty squawks and shakedowns than we've taken in for the whole season. I didn't even try to cut the license. I've rented lots on all four sides of us so some bird can't sashy in with an attachment suit to block the road."

"Blackbird'd be behind it, framing the whole thing up on a fifty-fifty basis. We're in a bad baby, this town, and I'm laying low and saying nothing. O. K.?"

"Sure. Get back to the lot and tell the gang to keep all the stores closed—unless I pass the word."

Sweetie Papa turned back into his private car to await the dictation on routine circus business, then slowly made his way through the railroad yards to the streets which led to the downtown district.

There, a demure, inconspicuous figure in the midst of the gathering parade crowd, he stood for a long time on the main corner, studying with a mild, interested gaze the various which proclaimed Blue Ridge's most important bank, and almost boyishly, watching the busy activities of the glass-enclosed money center, at last to turn at a pinch on his arm. It was Bart Edwards, the fixer. "Here's a funny hunch," he exclaimed. "They've cut the reader!"

"Cut it? How?"

"Can't prove it by me. All I know is that about a half hour ago the license clerk comes bustling out to the lot and looked me up. Asked me if I'd go down to the city hall with him for a minute. When I got there he hands me back a century note and tells me that a good friend of ours in town here had pointed out the fact that a circus right at this time was a wonderful advantage to the merchants in getting the folks into town and that there ought to be a rebate on the license."

Sweetie Papa's eyes twinkled.

"Wonder if Blackbird's framing to take us off our guard, so he can hand out a wallop like an ostrich's kick."

"And the cut in the license ain't all?"

"You said it. I'm busting out of the city hall when I run into the chief of police. He takes me off to one side and asks me if I've got any stores with the show. I stalled like I didn't know what he was talking about. Then he came out flatfooted and asked me if we didn't carry a little gambling."

"And you said—"

"That if we did, you sure bet it is."

# FINESSE

BY COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

Who Takes Us Behind the Scenes at the Circus



"THE FUNDS OF THE COMBINATION HAD FALLEN PERCEPTIBLY."

"Then, listen. This sucker that I've got in tow—"

"You was sure a swell little woman," Sweetie Papa broke in. "She's sure Blackie. The only trouble with you was that you didn't appreciate her. Now—"

"But who's talking about Lou? I ain't. I don't care nothing about her and I never did. What I was saying was that this sucker—"

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"Who ever turned a friend?"

"Oh, I'm not mentioning any names. But it seems to me that I remember a fellow like you coming to me in Salt Lake and putting up the same sort of stall that you're trying to slip over today—all about a sucker that was willing to part with some real money. If I remember right, just about the time everything got to going good, there was a fight in front of the hideout. Blackie, I'm telling you. Roll that over your tongue once and see how it sounds!"

But Sweetie Papa shook his head.

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